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# Experience with Using Guard Dogs

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## EXPERIENCE WITH USING GUARD DOGS

Ron Swan

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As do many of the sheep producing areas, we at the Antelope Range Livestock Research Station have problems with coyotes killing our lambs. During the summer of 1986 we lost 70 of 450 lambs to the coyotes.

In April of 1987 we purchased a 10-month-old Great Pyrenees male guard dog. He herded the sheep to some extent and gathered them into a bunch in the evenings. He was careful to gather the little lambs which helped minimize our lamb loss on the prairie. After gathering, he would sleep with the flock.

We fed him in a covered salt box feeder that could be moved from pasture to pasture. We did not pet or play with him in any way so as to not encourage him to stay where people were. He would come 1 to 3 miles back to the barn every two to four days. We would haul or drive him back to the sheep. He was not aggressive toward people, horses or cattle. We had cows, calves and sheep together for a few weeks. Once the cows figured out he wasn't going to hurt the calves, they got along fine.

In August he got to traveling more and more and was hit on the highway 7 miles from where he was supposed to be. I think he was lonesome and in need of company. Had we petted him or had another guard dog for company, I think he would have been okay.

Despite our learning how to manage the dog and his premature death, we still cut our death loss to 14 head with only six

lambs not accounted for out of 425 total lambs.

In May of 1988 we purchased a pair of Great Pyrenees dogs. The female was 5 months old and the male was only 2 months old. I tied one of them to the windmill tower at night and the other during the day for 1 week to help locate them where the sheep were. We used an old car for a feed station and portable dog house. It provided shelter and was easily moved to each pasture.

The dogs remained with the sheep and were much more content with themselves. They traveled around some after the lambs were taken off in late August but were still often found with the sheep. This past winter the cows and sheep were wintered in the same two pastures. The dogs stayed with the sheep most of the time and with the cows occasionally. The dogs were around the cows during calving and didn't cause any trouble with the cows.

While lambing was going on in the shed and corrals, the dogs would come by but did not stay more than a few hours at a time. Now that the ewes and lambs are turned out, the dogs stay with the flock.

I feel the dogs are a good tool to help reduce predator damage in sheep operations. It takes some time to get them located and they need to be fed regularly. We pet them often out in the pasture or in the shed but ignore them when they come around the house.